

Support in Schools: Implementing an In-School Resource Program for Family and Student Basic Needs

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Background Information:

- Basic needs include food, shelter, clothing, and more. Without these necessities, there is a risk of physical, mental, and behavioral health issues as well as a negative impact on academic performance for youth/adolescents.
- Children experiencing food insecurity have higher risk (19% and 27% higher) for lifetime asthma and depressive symptoms compared to children who are not food insecure (Thomas et al., 2019).
- Youth experiencing housing instability are at greater risk of poor mental health including increased suicidal ideation and/or attempt and engagement in substance use (McKinnon et al., 2023).
- The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that supports homeless youth and children with enrollment and maintaining educational stability (OSPI, n.d.).
- There is a lack of school social workers in Tacoma Public Schools District.

Needs Statement:

School district leaders should require that all public elementary, middle and high schools in Tacoma offer in-school resources related to student's basic needs to enhance their well-being and stability across both home and school environments.

Project Goals:

Tacoma students and their families will have access to a range of resources designed to support them in fulfilling their basic needs.

- Reduced number of students experiencing food and housing insecurity.
- Most schools in Tacoma will have a coordinator to operate program.
- More schools in Tacoma Public School district will have a school social worker.

Theories:

- **Community Engagement Theory:** In schools, this can support building a working connection between the community partners, school leaders, families, and schools. Connection between all partners can support the learning and behavior of students as well.
- **Intersectionality:** Supports in understanding the experiences of families with varying identities who are lacking basic needs. Black and Hispanic families experience food insecurity at higher rates than White families (Ullmann et al., 2022). Youth of color and youth of sexual minority are likely than other youth to experience homelessness (McKinnon et al., 2023).

Intervention:

An in-school program will be developed to address the basic needs of students. Tacoma schools will have in-person site coordinators, each assigned a caseload of McKinney-Vento (MV) students at their respective schools. These coordinators will engage with families and students to identify and provide necessary support. The site coordinators' offices will also serve as a pantry, offering students access to essential resources such as perishable food, clothing, school supplies, and hygiene products. Additionally, each school will have a social worker (BSW or MSW) who will connect families with external resources, including housing assistance and employment opportunities.

Site Coordinator Responsibilities:

- Weekly check-ins
- Pre and post assessment
- Interviews with school staff
- Connect with MV liaison
- Stock offices/rooms with items for students
- Host events for all families

School SW Responsibilities:

- Weekly check-in with families
- Provide outside resources
- Advocate for families

Community Partnerships:

- Food banks
- Clothing banks
- Shelters
- Kitchens
- Housing agencies

Outcome 1: Students and families have access to and utilize in-school resources related to their basic needs within 6-9 months of implementing the program in schools.

Indicator A: Uptake in number of families in participating in food and clothing pantry in the first 3 months of implementing program in schools.

Indicator B: Uptake in number of families connecting with school social worker in the first 3 months of implementing program in schools.

Outcome 2: Students' academic performance and attendance rates improve in 1 year of utilizing resource and having access to in-school resources.

Indicator A: School staff will report improved attendance and academic performance of students utilizing in-school resource during interviews.

Indicator B: Students will share improvement in grades through monthly report cards/grade checks to site coordinator.

Evaluation:

- Site coordinators will administer pre and post surveys to families and students on each of their caseloads.
- Site coordinators will conduct 2 interviews with school staff members such as administrators, counselors, teachers, and others who students feel connected to.
- Interviews and surveys will be completed each year. Post test and second interviews will be completed 1 year after pre-test and initial interview by the same families, students, and school staff.
- Site coordinators and SSW will also track the number of families. students utilizing services/ participating in program.



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